

Foreign Student Visas - The Problem

Last year, it was brought to my attention that a fine young man and outstanding student from Uganda, Humphrey Tusimiirwe, was having difficulty obtaining a student visa to study at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. Although he had been accepted at St. Thomas, awarded a full scholarship, and had completed the necessary paperwork, he was denied a student visa twice because of senseless bureaucratic red tape.

After personally intervening to help Tusimiirwe obtain a visa, I felt compelled to introduce legislation to put an end to these unnecessary bureaucratic roadblocks that have prevented thousands of qualified foreign students from studying at American institutions of higher learning.

Tusimiirwe's story is a window from which to view the larger picture of the serious decline of international applications and admittances to U.S. colleges and universities. The facts show that international applications to U.S. graduate schools fell 28 percent from fall 2003 to fall 2004 and 54 percent of all English as a Second Language (ESL) programs have reported declines in overall applications, at a time where countries such as the U.K., Canada, and Australia are experiencing increases.

This decline has had a real effect on our economy, which benefits from the \$13 billion international students spend here – not to mention their contributions to American scientific innovation and business. International students paying out-of-state tuition help keep college costs lower for American students. Foreign students provide Americans here at home with the opportunity to learn about other countries and cultures. Finally, it is in America's national interests that future international leaders continue to be educated in America.

The Solution - The ACTION Act

That is why I introduced the American Competitiveness Through International Openness Now (ACTION) Act.

To help America regain lost ground in attracting the world's best and brightest, my bill calls for a strategic marketing plan, similar to the strategies implemented by the U.K., Canada, and Australia. This plan would encourage international students to consider American schools through international ad campaigns and innovative web-based resources, among other options.



A central component of my bill sets more realistic standards for visa evaluations by updating a 50-year old criterion for visa approval. Under my legislation, consular officers would no longer have to determine an applicant's desire to return to their home country since this is often difficult to prove and unrealistic in this age of globalization.

Instead, if a student can demonstrate intent and sufficient financial resources to complete their program of study, they would be deemed qualified for admittance to the United States.

My bill proposes common-sense changes to the way the SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information Systems) system, which tracks international students and visitors, is managed. Currently, prospective students are entered into this additional database at a non-refundable fee of \$100 – whether or not they are issued visas, and separate from their \$100 visa interview fee. The result is a clogged database and an unfair system. Meanwhile, universities are struggling with an unresponsive bureaucracy to make even small corrections to student records in this database. Under my legislation the database would be run more effectively, and students would be entered into it only if they were actually heading to the U.S.

My bill sets standards for more timeliness and certainty in the student visa process. It also requires seamless communication between the separate branches of our government dealing with student visas, so that we can use technology to better identify security risks and clear more quickly those who are not a threat.

After September 11th we implemented tougher immigration procedures to keep America safe, and that was the right and necessary thing to do. But I think we can be smarter about how we use these tools or we will continue to discourage legitimate international study here in America, which hurts our economy and robs us of the opportunity to share our culture of freedom with the rest of the world.



The Word on ACTION

“The ACTION proposal is designed to reverse a nationwide decline in the number of foreign students coming to America for college and postgraduate work. Coleman’s plan seeks to change that on several levels. Most importantly, it sets clear standards and protocols for getting visas. It also makes common-sense changes to the federal tracking system created after the 9-11 terrorist attacks.”

The St. Cloud Times

“Bright young immigrants, fresh from U.S. graduate schools, are key to helping this nation meet industry’s galloping demand for engineers and scientists, at a time when the number of American high school students preparing to enter those fields is dwindling. That’s why congressional action is needed now to ease the way for foreign students into American universities once more.”

The Minneapolis Star and Tribune

“The best foreign students are no longer beating a path to American universities. A major reason is overly tight visa restrictions brought into play by the Bush administration. The idea is to create barriers to terrorism. Caught up in the web are students. So are medical patients who once flocked to Rochester and the Mayo Clinic. We back Sen. Norm Coleman’s pitch to ease restrictions.”

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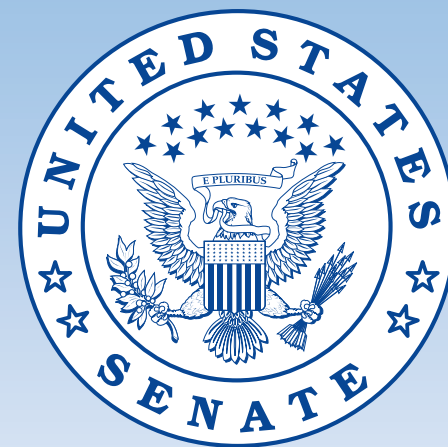
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UNITED STATES SENATOR
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Taking ACTION to Keep Minnesota Colleges Competitive

Senator Coleman’s
ACTION Act



<http://www.coleman.senate.gov>